First of a Series on

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO—INTRODUCTION

by

HARRIET SMITH

Raymond Foundation

CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
RESEARCH EDUCATION
FOUNDED 1893 BY MARSHALL FIELD

Museum Stories, Number 193

March 4, 1950

Children of Long Ago—Introduction

Have you ever wondered what your life would be like if you had been born in some other country–how you'd be dressed, what sort of school you'd go to, how your name would sound in another language? In this series of stories you'll have to stretch your imagination, not only across the ocean but back across time to the long-ago days when early people were building the first great civilizations–those of the Old World.

For a long time all men were hunters. Then, when they had tamed some of the wild cattle, families wandered wherever they could find grasslands for their flocks and herds. In dry lands, the best grass grew in the river valleys, like the narrow valley of the Nile in Egypt, the wide, flat valley between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the Near East, and the Yangtze and Huang Ho river valleys of China. In such comfortable places the nomads stayed for longer and longer periods. Soon they learned to plant seeds of wild grain and to store their crops. A number of families would build their houses together in villages, and just settling down in one place changed the people. As some of the towns became cities, their people learned new ways to live–ways that we call civilized. Our words "civilized" and "civil," or "polite," actually mean "like in a city."

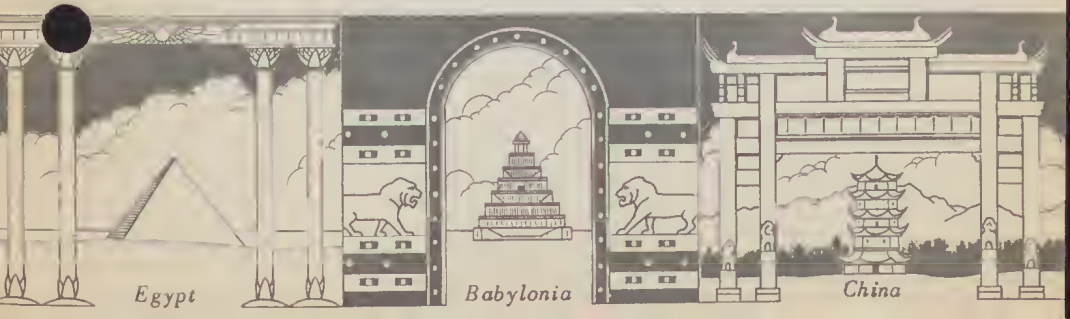
When a farm village grew into a city, some of the farmers became traders and landlords for whom other people worked. Such leaders of the neighborhood were better educated and had finer clothing and houses than the common people. One of these local noblemen in

Egypt became so powerful and had such a fine palace that he was called "Pharaoh," which simply means "the great house," just as we sometimes say "the White House" when we mean our president. The Pharaohs of Egypt and the kings of Babylonia and China ruled whole nations.

With so many people living together, rules had to be worked out for getting along with each other—rules for working together to build roads and irrigation ditches, rules about treating each other fairly in business and about taxes to support the army and the temples and to pay for running the government. Such rules became the law of the land. Of course, with life getting more complicated all the time, no one could keep all the information about law and history, science and religion, in his head, and so records had to be kept. Writing in Egypt was invented mainly to record religious beliefs and in China to write messages to the ancestor spirits and to record history; but the earliest records in the commercial nation of Babylonia were of business deals, taxes, and laws.

In civilized countries, children could no longer get all their education at home. They still learned from their parents how to hunt and farm or to keep house, but they went to school to learn reading and writing, arithmetic, history, religion, and civics. The boys and girls who lived in those faraway times grew up to be discoverers of many ideas we still use. They left records of their lives not only in writing and pictures but in the actual things they made and wore and used. You can see many of these things—toys, storybooks, tools, boats, and chariots—in the Museum exhibits.

DOORWAYS TO THE PAST



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Second of a Series on

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO

TWO BOYS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

by

HARRIET SMITH

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, Number 194

March 11, 1950

Two Boys of Ancient Egypt

Today you are going to meet two boys of ancient Egypt. Though the boys are only ten years old, their bald-looking heads make them seem strangely old to us, for Egyptian men and boys of the working class kept their heads shaved. One boy wears a linen skirt reaching to his knees and has palm-fiber sandals on his feet. You can tell that the smaller boy is more used to an out-of-door life. He is barefoot and wears a much shorter kilt. In his hand he carries a light, pointed stick to use as a spear, and his friend has a throwing stick, for the boys are hunting wild ducks in a marsh on the Nile River.

As they slip quietly along the trail through the reeds, the larger boy stumbles and the slim leader turns to whisper, "Sh, Ursu! You make so much noise with your big, clumsy feet!" Most Egyptians are rather small; so Ursu does seem unusually large for his age. That is how he got his name. When he was born his father exclaimed, "Ursu!" which means, in the old Egyptian language, "He is a big fellow!" (What was the first thing your family said about you? That would be your name if you had been born in ancient Egypt.)

Egyptian names and nicknames almost always told something about the appearance or character of the person. Ursu's friend had been named Seneb-ir-au (Healthy-is-the-joy-maker) because his family was so happy to have this fine baby. But only the priest and the schoolmaster called him Seneb now. When he was still quite a small boy he was nicknamed Saab (the Jackal) for his clever-

ness and the swift, quiet way in which he moved. That was why, when the boys went hunting, Saab was always the leader, but when they wrestled or played tug-of-war, it was Ursu who won.

Saab is already learning to be a hunter like his father, who is in charge of the prince's game preserve—a sort of private zoo. An Egyptian boy did not daydream about what he would be when he grew up. Everyone expected him to continue his father's job, and as soon as he was about nine years old he started helping his father at work. Ever since he could remember, Saab had looked forward to the exciting life of a hunter and secretly felt sorry for his friend Ursu, who was learning to be a papermaker like his father. But to Ursu, papermaking was a very important job. He was proud to remember that it might have been his own great-great-great- (he couldn't count back how many "greats"!) grandfather who first discovered, over a thousand years before Ursu was born, that paper could be made from the fibers of the Nile river-reed, papyrus.

So today, while Saab has eyes only for the wild ducks, Ursu is noticing where the best patches of river reeds grow. He and his father will come back to gather bundles of these papyrus stalks and soak them until the fibers come loose. Whenever he watches his father pounding the long strands into strong white strips, Ursu likes to imagine the picture-writing the scribes will draw on the smooth paper. Perhaps the very sheet he helped finish this morning will be used to tell the story of the expedition just returning from the strange land of Punt. Far down the river the boys can see the five great ships anchoring at Thebes, capital city of Egypt. They can tell from the way the ships sit low in the water that they are loaded with foreign treasures—gifts to the Queen from the people of Punt. Yes, all nations fear and respect Egypt's world-wide power, and Ursu is proud that his paper will last to tell the knowledge and deeds of the Egyptian people long after Saab's ducks and fish have disappeared from the cook pot.

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Third of a Series on

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO

AN EGYPTIAN SCHOOL BOY

by

HARRIET SMITH

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, Number 195

March 18, 1950

An Egyptian School Boy

Intef knelt before the statue at the entrance to the House of Books. He was praying to Thoth, the Egyptian God of Learning, to guide his hand as he wrote his school lessons for the day.

The sort of picture-writing called hieroglyphics had been invented by the Egyptians so long ago that no one remembered the name of the first man to make written records. They said it was a god with the head of a marsh bird who had invented the picture-words and had taught the people of the Nile Valley how to write them down in ink on paper made from a marsh reed.

Intef was studying for the most important profession in Egypt—that of a scribe. You may wonder why just being able to write should make a man respected and successful. Egyptian girls never learned to write; and in the five or six years most boys went to school they only learned to copy the picture-signs in wise sayings and magic prayers that the schoolteacher wrote out for them. When they grew up, very few of them knew how to combine the signs they had learned into the sentences they needed in their letters and business records, and so most men had to hire professional scribes to do their writing for them. Thus a scribe could be sure of earning a living without having to do hard work, and only a boy trained to be a scribe had a chance to rise to a wealthier position than his own father's job. He might even become one of the Pharaoh's governors.

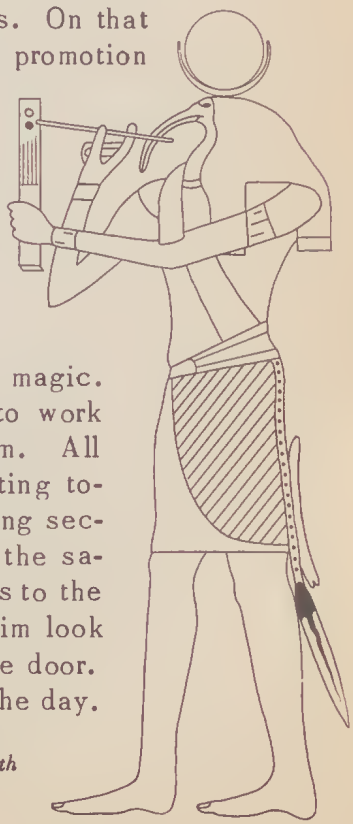
An Egyptian school was called "The House of Books" because there were no real libraries, and it was only in the temples, business offices, and schools that books were kept. Egyptian books were long rolls of papyrus, called scrolls, which were stored, standing upright, in big vases like umbrella stands.

Though it was only a little after sunrise, Intef was late for school; and, as he found his own copybook in one of the vases and sat down cross-legged on the floor

with the older boys, he was worried to see the schoolmaster scowling at him. This was a warning that even the smallest mistake in his copying today would earn him a beating. Teachers were very strict, for it was a popular Egyptian saying that "A boy's ears are on his back, and he hears when he is flogged."

Intef quickly got out the pen-and-paint box tucked in his belt and started copying from an ancient book the wise sayings with which a father had long ago taught his son good manners and right living. Carefully he wrote: "Don't talk too much, for a man's tongue may ruin him," "Don't be greedy at meals," "Never sit down while an older person stands," "Set to work and become a scribe, for then you will be a leader of men."

The youngest boys, even the four-year-olds, were practicing drawing picture-signs of birds and animals, men and gods, on whitewashed boards. Intef remembered how proud he had been when the teacher said he was ready to write on papyrus. On that very day he had decided to try to win promotion to the School of Scribes rather than leave school when he was twelve to go into his father's trading business. Some of the older boys were doing arithmetic problems. Their textbook was called "Instructions for Knowing All Dark Things" because knowledge of science and mathematics was considered a sort of black magic. Intef felt sorry for the boys trying to work problems in such a noisy schoolroom. All the between-age students were shouting together at the top of their lungs, reciting sections they had learned by heart from the sacred books. Intef tried to shut his ears to the noise until an extra loud yell made him look up. All the boys were running out the door. It was noon, and school was over for the day.



Thoth

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Fourth of a Series on

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO

PARADE OF THE TRIBUTE-BEARERS

by

HARRIET SMITH

Raymond Foundation

CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
RESEARCH EDUCATION
FOUNDED 1893 BY MARSHALL FIELD

Museum Stories, Number 196

March 25, 1950

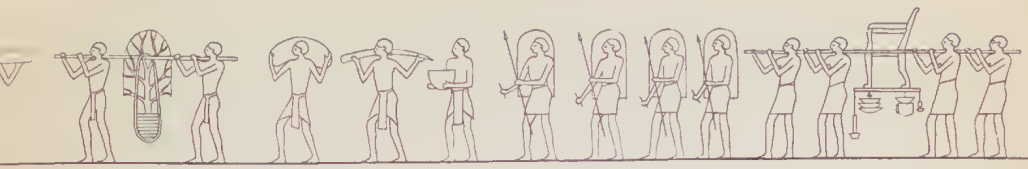
Parade of the Tribute-Bearers

All morning a little girl kept running onto the flat roof of her home to watch men unloading the five big ships anchored in the Nile River beside Egypt's capital city. Many months ago Queen Hatshepsut had sent Merryat's father as leader of a great expedition to the Land of Punt, where sweet-smelling incense trees grow. Now the ships had returned so heavily loaded that Merryat was sure they had reached that far-off country. However, from this distance she couldn't see what the sailors were carrying, and she knew, no matter what rich treasures had been brought back, the Queen would say her father had failed unless he had been able to persuade the King of Punt to send live incense trees for the temple garden of Egypt's sun god, Amon Rē.

But Merryat was no more excited than every other child in the city of Thebes. There weren't any circus parades in those ancient days, but it was almost like one whenever an Egyptian expedition came home. The explorers marched through the streets with strange wild animals and people, too—giants and dwarfs, dark-skinned or light—in all sorts of gay foreign costumes.

Like the other rich people, Merryat and her mother rode into Thebes in their litter, a platform carried by eight slaves. Everyone had gathered along the main street to watch the procession. First came twenty-five priests of the Temple of Amon, carrying a beautiful golden litter. The only passenger in this litter was a tiny boat, hidden inside which the people thought the god himself was riding.

After the priests marched the sailors and some of the natives of Punt carrying rich gifts: jars of gold ore and trays of precious resin, the sticky, sweet-smelling



sap of a tree. Some of the natives led chattering baboons and green monkeys, and others carried a live panther in a cage. Walking reluctantly behind the panther's cage was the strangest sight of all—a lanky, spotted creature so tall it could look right over the tops of the one-storied Egyptian houses. Merryat laughed to see the men tugging at ropes tied to each of the giraffe's legs as if they were pulling a giant toy.

The last group of natives from Punt carried elephants' tusks and ebony wood, perfumes and spices. Then came more sailors carrying heavy baskets on long poles. Thirty-one healthy incense trees were actually growing in the baskets! After they passed, the street smelled like a garden. Now Merryat could see her father marching proudly at the head of the soldiers. At the very end of the parade came twelve litter-bearers with the Queen's empty throne chair.

The crowd fell in behind the procession and followed it to the palace. As they pushed through the gateway, one of the little green monkeys jerked his leash loose and ran into the crowd. Suddenly, there he was sitting on Merryat's shoulder! She whispered to her mother that she didn't see what use either the Queen or the Sun God would have for a small monkey—anyway its mischief would only cause a lot of trouble for the priests of the temple. The priests must have thought the same thing, for none of them seemed anxious to recover the chattering imp.

But the native from whom the animal had escaped rushed back and picked up his pet. Merryat could hear him scolding the little fellow in a strange language as they went on inside the palace, where Queen Hatshepsut was waiting to receive all these odd and beautiful and precious gifts brought from the farthest land of the ancient world in honor of great Egypt's Sun God.

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Fifth of a Series on

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO

AN EGYPTIAN PARTY

by

HARRIET SMITH

Raymond Foundation

CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
RESEARCH EDUCATION
FOUNDED 1893 BY MARSHALL FIELD

Museum Stories, Number 197

April 1, 1950

An Egyptian Party

Lady Merryat wriggled so impatiently on the edge of her bed that she rumpled its leopard-skin cover. Her wig slid over one ear as the nurse tried to smooth the little girl's black bobbed hair under its edges. She was being dressed in her finest clothes and jewelry so that her father would be proud to have her stand beside him when her parents greeted their party guests.

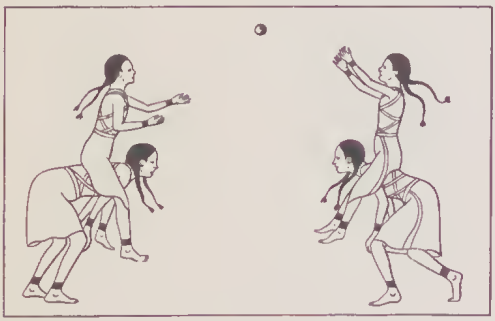
All morning there had been so much going on that Merryat was still out of breath from running—dashing from the gardens, where maids sang as they wove flower wreaths, then inside to watch the banquet hall being decorated with flowers and embroidered hangings and rugs, and back, time after time, to the kitchens, where wonderful smells told of all the good things being prepared for the feast. This was where her nurse had found her when it was time to get dressed.

After the bustle of the morning, the house seemed very quiet by midafternoon, when the nobleman led his family out into the garden to receive the company. Here the guests were decorated with flowers before they took their places in the dining hall. Only the Lord and his wife and their most important guests sat in chairs beside small tables piled with food, fruit, and flowers. The rest sat on rugs on the floor, picnic style. Merryat was too young to have a place at such a formal party, but she was allowed to watch from an upstairs balcony. She could see maids moving from guest to guest, offering to pour more meat sauce from tall, slim bottles onto the food piled in dinner plates shaped like our soup bowls. The diners ate with their fingers and drank from goblets of white stone or blue and green glass and even silver and gold.

It wouldn't have been much fun just watching the grownups eat, but for Egyptian children a banquet was like going to a show. As soon as he had made sure that everyone was served, the chief steward clapped

his hands, and, from the side door, there was an answering stamp of feet in time with clinking of castanets and kettledrums. In came the first act, five Syrian slave girls dressed in long, thin robes. Four of the girls danced in pairs, turning slowly and gracefully to the song of the fifth girl, who clapped her hands to mark the time of the dance.

Merryat preferred more action and gaiety, like the tumbling act that followed. These men came in, turning cartwheels in time to very fast music, and leaped upon each others' shoulders to form pyramids. We'd call such skillful tricks "gymnastics," but any rhythmic movements—whether graceful gesturing of the arms or vigorous acrobatics—when accompanied by music or singing were considered dancing in ancient Egypt.



The next act was best of all. These were Egyptian girls not much older than Merryat. Dressed in very short skirts with bright ribbons wrapped around their bodies, they skipped into the open space in the center of the dining hall, tossing red balls back and forth to each other without missing a beat of the music. First they took turns showing all kinds of juggling tricks, and then they had a sort of ball game, still in time to the music, with the smaller of each pair of girls riding pickaback on her partner. The act ended with all four girls at once trying to keep as many balls in the air as possible. Merryat already could juggle three balls, and she imagined how she would practice adding another and another. In her dream it was easy, and she was watching twelve red balls dancing over her own head when the nurse awoke her to take her to bed.

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Sixth of a Series on

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO

GOING TO SCHOOL IN BABYLON

by

HARRIET SMITH

Raymond Foundation

CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
RESEARCH EDUCATION
FOUNDED 1893 BY MARSHALL FIELD

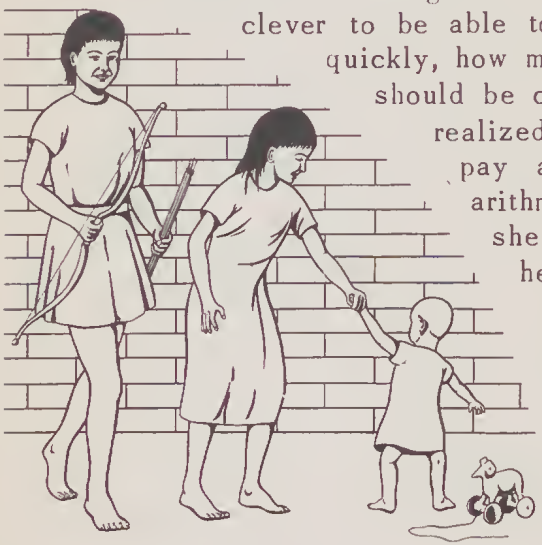
Museum Stories, Number 198

April 8, 1950

Going to School in Babylon

The baby dropped the string with which he had been pulling his toy pottery sheep around the kitchen floor and started to follow his brother and sister out the gate that opened on the street. The children could hear him crying as their mother picked him up and told him to come back inside and play with his toys—he was too young to go to school.

Sin-abi and Beltani went down the narrow street, and, as they turned the corner into the market place, Beltani lagged behind her brother to listen to a housewife arguing with a farmer about the price of cucumbers and onions. She thought the woman was very clever to be able to figure out, so quickly, how many shekels she should be charged; and she realized a girl had better pay attention to her arithmetic lessons if she expected to run her own home capably when she grew up. This reminder of school sent her running to catch up with Sin-abi, and it was a good thing they hurried the rest of the way. The doorkeeper, sitting inside the entrance hallway, was just picking up his tablet ready to write down names on the late list.



The children scurried down the dark, hall-like room and out into the sunshine of the courtyard, where classes were held. The younger boys and girls of Beltani's class were already reading off the words of the writing lesson. The schoolmaster had written out, in

large characters on a big clay tablet, part of the religious-history lesson—the story of the flood and the ark. When he was sure they all understood the meaning of every word on the "blackboard," he sent them to the pile of soft clay in one corner of the courtyard to pat out their own writing tablets in the shape of small, rounded bricks. Beltani sat on the ground in front of the big copybook tablet and started denting tiny picture-words with a sharp-edged stick into the wet surface of the clay tablet she held in her hand.

While the younger children practiced writing, the teacher joined Sin-abi's class for their history lesson. It was about Sargon, the nomad boy who was adopted by a gardner and became Babylonia's first great king.

Babylonian school children learned reading, writing, history and religion, mathematics and measurement, and a good deal of law. The girls would all become housewives and most of the boys farmers, or traders and craftsmen, and so they all would need to be able to keep their household and business records and know their legal rights and responsibilities. Sin-abi was making a special study of foreign languages, for he planned to travel to far-off lands in his father's trading business. However, a Babylonian boy didn't have to carry on his father's work and poor and rich children all had the same chance to be educated. The brightest boy in Sin-abi's class, the son of a poor ditchdigger, was going on next year to the school for lawyers, and the King's own brother was a librarian.

For Beltani, the worst part of school was memorizing the tables of measurements; but this morning, remembering the clever housewife in the market, she determined to master them so that she'd never be cheated either when she went shopping. For the first time she was sorry when the girls were dismissed from school. Sin-abi stayed on for the boys' class in archery, and it was a good thing the girls were out of the way when arrows started whizzing around the school courtyard.

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Seventh of a Series on

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO

BABYLON—ANCIENT CROSSROADS CITY

by

HARRIET SMITH

Raymond Foundation

CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
RESEARCH EDUCATION
FOUNDED 1893 BY MARSHALL FIELD

Museum Stories, Number 199

April 15, 1950

Babylon—Ancient Crossroads City

There was always something exciting going on in the city market of Babylon, and after school Sin-abi liked to go to the square to watch and listen to the caravan drivers and traders from foreign lands. This afternoon, the rug merchant was moving piles of rugs to make room for a new shipment from Persia that was still loaded on camels standing before his shop. Looking far down the street to the arched gateway of the city, Sin-abi could see other caravans having their passports checked so they could enter the capital city of Babylonia. The long lines of loaded donkeys and camels were bringing trade goods from the eastern countries, Persia and India, and from Egypt, far to the west.

Sin-abi stopped to look at the fine bronze knives an Egyptian merchant had spread out on a mat. When the Egyptian told the boy he planned to buy wheat with the money he got for his knives, Sin-abi remembered his father had told him that the rich farms of Babylonia supplied grain and dates to all other countries. Merchandise traded from this city at the crossroads of the ancient world was marked with the famous signet seals that Babylonian jewelers cut from beautiful stones brought all the way from Syria to their stoneless land. Sin-abi's father marked his goods with a cylinder seal carved in a design of two lions with the family motto written around them. He wore it on a chain around his wrist so that it was always on hand to sign a letter or mark a jar of wine or bale of wool as his property.

The creaking of the pottery-maker's wheel made Sin-abi move on to the next stall. He was watching the potter shape a lump of wet clay into a pointed wine jar when a group of priests came into the market place, leading some goats and rams they had collected as temple taxes from the farms outside town. Just as they were passing the pottery shop, one of the rams broke loose, running through the pile of finished pots put out for sale and right on into the shop where the potter was working. As Sin-abi jumped out of the way, he leaned over and caught the rope tied around the ram's neck. When the priests thanked him, the boy offered to help them drive the animals across the city to the temple.

In this flat land, Babylon's famous temple-tower, the Ziggurat, stood so high it could be seen from any part of the city. "Ziggurat" is a Babylonian word meaning "Mountain of God," and the priest walking beside Sin-abi explained that long ago, when people first settled in the flat valley between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, they were lonesome for the mountain country from which they had come. Believing their principal god, Marduk, was used to living in high places too, they built his temple on an artificial mountain, piling earth with brick walls into seven great steps, each painted a different color. High up in his temple, the golden statue of the god sat on a golden throne. Babylonians believed that Marduk himself had given the laws of the land to an early king, Hammurabi, and that the god still guided their king in ruling the nation.

As they came nearer the Ziggurat, Sin-abi could see other groups of priests bringing in animals. A priest told him that all these animals were being collected as offerings for Marduk at the New Year's festival of Zagmuk next week. After King Nebuchadnezzar himself had given the animals to the god, he would go up to the statue of Marduk and hold its hands so that divine power would flow into Babylon's king for another year, giving him wisdom and strength to rule the nation for the good of the people.

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Eighth of a Series on

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO

A CHINESE BOY

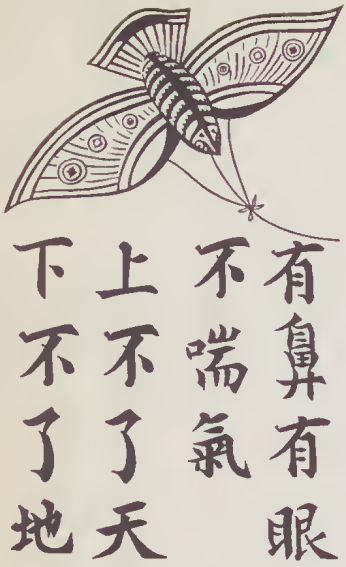
by

JUNE BUCHWALD

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, Number 200

April 22, 1950



A Chinese
Mother Goose Rhyme

Translation:

I have a nose and eyes
But I cannot breathe or aee,
Up to heaven I cannot rise,
Down on earth I will not be.

WHAT AM I? *

A Chinese Boy

A great uproar fairly shook the small wooden building in the city of Yueh-chow in southern China. Contributing to this general hubbub was Lan-chu, who with other boys sat in the schoolroom reciting in a loud voice the day's lesson, a Confucius writing. The teacher struck his table with a block of wood, not for silence but for continued shouting from all the boys.

A howl was heard amidst the noisy singsong as the teacher's bamboo rod dealt a stinging blow on one lazy student who had given up shouting for a moment. This inspired Lan-chu to make a greater vocal effort in reciting and understanding the classical essay he was reading. The boys' memories were tested by reciting the lesson without looking at their books and with their backs to the teacher. At sundown, class was dismissed after having been in session since sunrise.

Lan-chu tucked his book into the big sleeve of his blue homespun gown and left the school with the others. He joined some boys in playing a game of shuttlecock and won, having kicked the feathered ball into the air one hundred times in succession without allowing it once to drop to the ground. Other boys were playing with their diabolos (humming machines), and, a little farther on, a mock battle was in progress.

Lan-chu started for home, walking slowly through the crowded, noisy, narrow streets. He was attracted to the lively, talkative merchants in their endless stalls, who tried to sell him candies, sweet potatoes, and water chestnuts. He expertly avoided a fortuneteller

*Anawer to the riddle: I am a kite in the ahape of an animal.

eager for business and a barber who tried to shave off his hair and turned his gaze to the shops displaying books with the newly invented printed pages, colored spectacles, fans for men and women, and coffins to be bought by oldest sons for aging fathers.

Finally he reached his father's shop, where he found the craftsman bent over a beautiful green porcelain teapot that he was painting with delicate designs. Lan-chu gazed admiringly over his father's shoulder at the graceful and noble form of the porcelain, which had been so recently invented during this Tang Dynasty. Then the boy spoke respectfully, "Good evening, my honored father."

"Ah, the arrival of my first son indicates the dinner hour," said the father looking up at the son who was so like him, short, lithe, with an olive complexion and dark hair—a son who could bring honor and wealth to his parents.

Man and boy then walked to the back of the shop through the curtained doorway where Lan-chu's mother and sister had set the table with a small bowl, chopsticks, and teacup at each place. On the table also was the usual big bowl of steaming rice, a dish of pork, and smaller bowls of cabbage and onion chopped up finely and seasoned with soy sauce.

After the leisurely meal, the four huddled around the bean-oil lamp—Lan-chu studying, his sister braiding a pair of straw sandals, and his mother spinning silk gathered from the silkworms she raised. Lan-chu's father was slowly writing a letter, dipping the pointed sheep's-hair brush into the thick black ink and patiently drawing each Chinese character on the paper.

Lan-chu's eyes wandered from his book as he thought about his future. He would have to take several literary examinations to be a mandarin (political official). Later he might become a governor or minister to the Emperor. But whatever the final position, as a scholar he would always be a treasure to China.

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Ninth of a Series on

CHILDREN OF LONG AGO

CHINESE NEW YEAR FESTIVAL

by

JUNE BUCHWALD

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, Number 201

April 29, 1950

Chinese New Year Festival

The sound of firecrackers awakened Lan-chu. As he rubbed his eyes, he thought, "Someone is chasing away evil!" Then his eyes widened and he jumped up from his floor bed. "Of course! This is New Year's Day!"

For weeks his mother and sister had been preparing for this—the greatest and longest of Chinese festivals. Only yesterday he had almost been swept out of the house as his sister cleaned every corner. Finally he had been driven out after his mother had found him in the kitchen sampling the choice delicacies being prepared—steaming meat dumplings, snow-white rice, cakes, pastries, and candies. He had joined other shouting boys on a happy holiday from school. Later, he had gone shopping with the family, for everyone in the city of Yueh-chow had to look his best in bright colorful clothes to celebrate the occasion. Then he had walked home with his arms full of purchases, for all shops would be closed for the holiday season. At

home he had decorated the front door with red paper sprinkled with gold and pasted five slips of paper above the door, signifying the family's desire for the five great blessings. These were long life, riches, health, love of virtue, and a natural death, often symbolized by bats, the emblems of happiness.

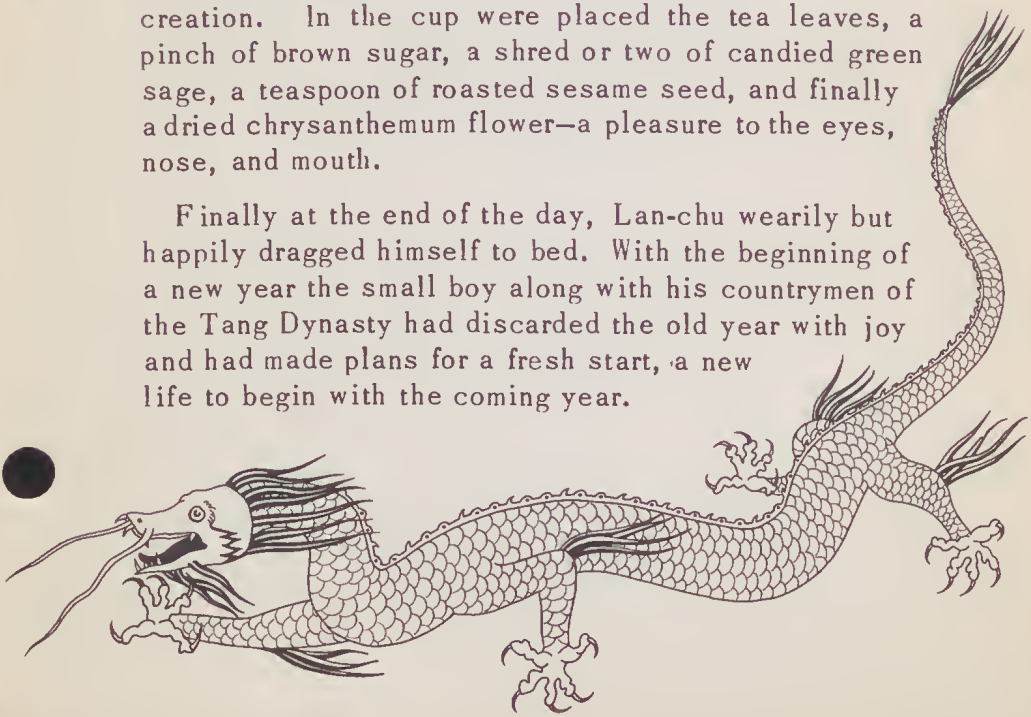
As he dressed in his new silk gown thickly padded for winter, he thought of the good times ahead—of play, family visits, presents, and feasting. The holidays would last for the entire half moon from New Year's Day until the Feast of the Lanterns, when at night he would join the procession in the streets, helping to carry the huge lighted bamboo-and-paper dragon to frighten away the evil spirits.

Finally he donned his black satin hat with its ball of red silk fluff, the color for joy and good luck. After the customary morning ceremonies of the sacrifice to heaven and earth and the worship of the family gods and deceased ancestors, he went to the schoolhouse to pay his respects to his teacher. According to custom, he bowed and shook his own clasped hands, saying, "I respectfully wish you blessings of joy."

Later he joined his family in their visits. He enjoyed his duty to kneel and bow before the aged relatives and friends; for it was a chance to see these very respected and honored persons and, also, he usually returned with gifts that included loose-skinned oranges for "good fortune," paper kites, and colorful wind wagons—the little wheels on bamboo racks that made clattering noises in the wind. He was particularly fond of a goldfish paper kite with huge round eyes that he could save for the kite-flying season in early spring.

And, of course, there was the customary invitation for tea at each house. New Year's Day tea was quite a creation. In the cup were placed the tea leaves, a pinch of brown sugar, a shred or two of candied green sage, a teaspoon of roasted sesame seed, and finally a dried chrysanthemum flower—a pleasure to the eyes, nose, and mouth.

Finally at the end of the day, Lan-chu wearily but happily dragged himself to bed. With the beginning of a new year the small boy along with his countrymen of the Tang Dynasty had discarded the old year with joy and had made plans for a fresh start, a new life to begin with the coming year.



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